

## TASTE BECAME BONES

*One: Become marked in your places of offering, and the paint shall give way to bleeding wounds.*

*Two: Imbibe of the spiced wine that is akin to your blood, hot tempered and dark.*

Juliet held Mistake's collar in a fist as the two of them marched through the verdant woods.

In Juliet's other hand, he held a jar of black paint, and a brush. He wore black garments, was fitted with a black satchel, and had dark bags under his eyes.

Mistake did not wear a stitch of clothing besides his collar. His body was an immaculate showcase of toned muscles, an example of a human who had undoubtedly worked on himself very mindfully. Using both hands, he carried a wine bottle.

As Juliet and Mistake marched along, they each panted, and sweat adorned their brows.

In the noonday sunlight, Juliet and Mistake arrived at a clearing strewn with boulders.

Juliet lingered with Mistake's collar in hand at the edge of the clearing, for a little while.

Sweat stung the two men's eyes. The sounds of loud insects filled the air, augmented now and then by a woodpecker's bursts of tapping.

The two of them caught their breath, from after the long walk.

The possibility now loomed, that Mistake was about to be killed, by surrendering his body to the woods; Juliet would sew up the wounds afterwards, but some things, there was no salvaging.

Juliet pulled down on the collar, kissed the muscular man on the mouth, and then led the way to the center of the clearing, fist never letting go of the collar at all, until they were at the center; only then did he let his fingers uncurl from the band, allowing Mistake one final chance to flee from this.

Mistake set down the bottle of wine beside his feet, and then stood upright in the center of the clearing.

Standing face to face with Mistake, Juliet recited, loudly, commandingly, wickedly, “One: Become marked in your places of offering, and the paint shall give way to bleeding wounds.” He unfastened the top from his jar of black paint, and dipped the brush inside.

He began making the marks.

Juliet painted claw marks across Mistake’s abs, and recited, “It is the taste of thine flesh: Human skin, human sweat, and human oils, it will be torn from muscle and bone greedily, and tasted from every side, chewed, gnawed upon, the flesh will become stuck in his teeth, this organ which for so long served to protect your innards—your lungs, your stomach, your liver, your heart—will be an annoyance in his teeth briefly, and then he will forget your skin forever.”

Juliet paced around the muscular man, knelt, and painted claw marks across Mistake’s buttocks, and recited, “It is the taste of thine sex: The pleasures that your body has offered to other men, the pleasures that your body has offered to ME, all of the seed you have taken into yourself, all of the moans and gasps, gifts given and received, accomplishments, firsts, reliable tricks; To him, it will all be a flavor; He would rip asunder your sexual organs or a clumsy virgin’s and care little for the difference.”

Juliet stood, grabbed the muscular man’s wrist, lifted the arm, and painted claw marks ripping down the bicep and the forearm and the fingers, and recited, “It is the taste of thine labor: Strengthened muscles that have lain a hundred thousand bricks to make cozy homes, built bonfires, lifted hammers, he

will tear your fingers from your hand, all of the work you have ever done will not free you from his appetite.”

Juliet painted claw marks trailing down the legs, and recited, “It is the taste of thine journeys: You will cease walking forever; These legs with the strength to walk for decades more, he will digest them.”

Juliet clutched the side of the muscular man’s head, and began painting an inverted pentagram over the man’s face, the top of it crossing his forehead, the bottom of it crossing his lower lip, and each of the inner lines cutting across his nose, his eyes, his mouth. As Juliet drew the inverted pentagram, he recited, “It is in the taste of thine beauty: You are splendid to look upon; Seeing you, saliva rushes in his mouth; He is ready to devour you.”

Juliet knelt, set the jar of paint and the brush upon the ground, and picked up the bottle of wine. Standing again, Juliet withdrew a corkscrew from his satchel, twisted it into the wine bottle’s plugged mouth, and pulled out the cork. Face to face with Mistake, Juliet offered the bottle of wine, and recited, “Two: Imbibe of the spiced wine that is akin to your blood, hot tempered and dark.”

Mistake took the bottle of spiced wine, lifted it up, and began gulping from it, rivulets of red streaking down his jawline, down his torso.

From the sunny sky, a crack of thunder sounded, and an enormous canine skeleton fell down upon Mistake; With his boney claws, the canine ripped open Mistake’s chest, the painted marks giving way perfectly to gaping bleeding wounds. Mistake was forced to the ground screaming in pain. The canine seized upon him on the ground, tearing and tasting the human offering. Wound after wound was torn open, and Mistake’s blood soaked the canine’s face and claws, pouring down off of the bones.

When he had eaten his fill, the enormous skeletal canine pranced forward to the edge of the clearing, bones clacking as he jauntily went, leaving a dripping trail of Mistake’s blood; Then, into the woods he leapt, bounding through the trees across hillsides and across rivers. Spreading out from places where the blood-soaked canid ran, the green leaves upon the trees dried,

and became blood-reds and sunset-oranges, vibrant yellows and dull browns; In a cold howl of wind, some of the dried leaves were blown off of the trees' branches, and began the thin blanket of autumn on the forest floor.

From his satchel, Juliet pulled out a needle and cords, and began sewing Mistake's torn pieces of flesh together again. Cold winds blew from the forest to all surrounding lands, carrying the sounds of a mortally wounded man screaming, clacking bones, and dry leaves brushing against tree trunks.